XIO3

GCACE

Garden City Atari Computer Enthusiasts
1003 Amphion St. Victoria, B.C. Canada V8S 4G2

JULY/AUGUST 1996

July 25th Meeting!

Craig Carmichael will demonstrate what's new with OASES, as explained in the article in this issue. Of particular interest will be the showing of "Movies" done in OASES. Craig will bring his camcorder and VIDI ST digitizer. He can then make a recoding at the meeting and show it through his operating system. Be sure to bruxh your teeth and show a big smile!

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ATARI®
NEWS AND RUMOURS

by Rowland Grant

Before Atari can complete its merger with JTS it must get shareholder approval. This approval is certain, seeing that more than 50 percent of Atari's stock is held by the Tramiels and their allies. Still, I expect there must be a shareholders meeting at which this approval is placed on record. June is the usual month for the Atari annual shareholders meeting. It may have taken place, but if so I haven't heard of it. Atari would have to report miserable sales for its Jaguar game system. In the first three months of this year, Atari had sales of $1.27 million, and suffered an operating loss of about $7.1 million. The loss was offset by profit from the sale of securities of $6.3 million. Thus a loss of only $806 thousand showed on the books. The merger can't come too soon.

Of course the arrangement between Atari and JTS has to be approved by the Security Exchange Commission (SEC). This may not be a formality. I suspect that the shareholders meeting has been postponed until SEC approval is given. There are rumours that decisions concerning further support for the Jaguar or disposal of Atari's assets will not be made until the merger has gone through. At that point, the management of JTS will make the decisions. It's not likely that they will care to spend more money in a losing market. Travis Guy of Atari Explorer Online posted a message saying that Atari is getting ready to close up shop. There will be no new games released. Atari will attempt to sell off the remaining stock in its warehouse, and when the merger takes place Atari will formally and officially cease to exist. Atari is renting its new facilities on a monthly basis, another sign of the end. Don Thomas of Atari denied knowledge of these rumoured policies. However the rumours have been correct so far. Don did mention that the Jaguar game Breakout 2000 was being worked on, but he didn't know when or if it would go into production. Atari's share prices rose to $9.00 on the expectation of the impending merger. Then with the poor first quarter report and no merger in June, Atari's shares drifted down to around $6.00, then dropped to $5.00. The high capacity small disk drive market is hot. So if JTS is seen to be getting established in this market, Atari's shares should move up considerably.

See *News and Rumours* **on Page 4**

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MEMBERSHIP

Membership dues are $25 per family per year. Membership includes a subscription to this newsletter, access to over 300 8-bit public domain disks and 190 ST disks and increased time and upload/download ratio on the club BBS, Pothole. It can be reached by modem at (604) 642-6795.

MEETINGS

Meetings will be held in the Nellie McClung branch of the Library at 3950 Cedar Hill Road (corner of McKenzie) on the fourth Thursday of each month. All meetings are at 7 pm. There is no meeting in the month of December.

EDITORIAL

John Towler, club treasurer, notified the executive at its last meeting that GCACE is losing money. As the club has managed to balance its budget or record a surplus in all its years of existence, we decided steps must be taken. The cause of our losses has been this newsletter. We can either raise the yearly dues, or find some way to cut down the newsletter expenses. Not wanting to raise the dues, we decided to cut down on expenses

The reason for high newsletter expenses is our policy of printing everything that comes in in the current issue. This has led to higher photocopying costs and going over ten pages raises our mailing costs from 45¢ to 72¢.

As editor, I will try to keep the pages to a minimum. This is helped by the fact that Rowland Grant is finding less information regarding Atari Corporation due to the fact they are completely out of the computer and video game business at this time.

We already have one member who wishes to receive his newsletter through the Freenet. I would be interested if any other members would accept the newsletter this way. Another way to save postage would be to have members pick up their newsletter at the meetings. If you feel either of these methods would suit you , kindly call me at 475-0857 or e-mail me at the address elsewhere on this page to let me know.

Gord

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Games:	Ted Skrecky	598-6173

PEEKing Around

by Gordon F. Hooper

... Welcome to new member ALLAN SHURA from Parksvillc. His *Power and the Gory* game is now finished ... TED SKRECKY just discovered last week that the food sold in 7 Eleven stores is inedible. He bought a hamburger for 96 cents, and JOHN PICKEN called him on that, suggesting he should have handed it to the clerk turned around, in which case it would have been 69 cents ... The founding and only members of the semi-official 8-Bit Owners and Drinking Society, John and I, were trying to get my newly acquired 5 horse outboard motor running the other day. We started our infrequent work session in the usual way by having a beer. Then we pulled and pulled the starter and it just wouldn't start. We then decided to disassemble the motor to check the magneto. This took half an hour because we had to remove the gas tank, which sits over the motor and thc magneto. After this much effort, it seemed prudent to have another beer to stave off dehydration, as the temperature was 33 degrees. The magneto looked fine to us, so we put it back together again. The motor was sitting on a stand with its shaft in a barrel of water, and when I was bending down to put some of the screws back in, I noticed a little knurled knob on the underside of the powerhead. So I looked in the motor to see what it was connected to. Duh. The knob was connected to a valve in a nylon line which led to the carburettor. After the gas shut-off valvc was turned on, thc motor started on the second pull. Another complex problem solved after the ingestion of a couple of beers. Next day we loaded it on the roof of my car and drove out to Gorge Road, where we found a small beach where we could launch it. We pushed off from shore until it was deep enough to lower the motor, started it and headed out about 50 feet until the motor stopped. Then we noticed it was less than two feet deep. Guess it was low tide, but who would have thought it was that shallow in the middle of thc Gorgc? Wc paddlcd until it was decp again and started the motor, only to discover that when it hit bottom and stopped, the shear pin did exactly what it was designed to do, and sheared off. We paddled to shore to replace it. Yes, we were smart enough to have more shear pins, extra gas, hell, we even had life jackets. We weren't smart enough to get the prop put back on without breaking the drive shaft with a hammer, however, so we went home instead. After some contemplation (not to mention more beer), we decided our next yachting experience would be after one of us won the lottery and we could buy a fifty-foot boat. Then all we would have to do would be to sit in the cockpit while the boat was tied up and drink our beer in peace ... Back to club news. JACK BASUK is the proud owner of a TT030 now. Someone was advertising it for sale on the Internet at a reasonable price, and Jack snapped it up ... LARRY EGGLETON was telling us at the June General meeting about how he had his ham radio and ST combined to record any messages from the Space Shuttle, which was in orbit at that time. We cajoled him into writing about how he did this for the newsletter. Now everybody knows, Larry, so wc'll bc waiting ... ROWLAND GRANT has been labouring mightily underneath his house repairing some posts that the house rests on ... BOB NEX at least has an excuse now why he hasn't been to meetings. He was working at night at Office Depot helping build their new addition ... GEORGE ROSE also has an excuse, he has been enjoying his new trailer now that the weather has improved ... JOHN TOWLER will be keeping the club books with his TT now. Up until this time , he has been using Bookkeeper on his trusty 8-bit ... I asked our Canadian astronaut to keep an eye out for any GCACE members doing dirty deeds with the mighty American camera which can distinguish car license plate numbers from space, but he didn't come through. So phone me at 475-0857 with any news. Do you ever get the feeling you are being watched? ...

LIBRARY REPORT

Catalogue Update

by Ted Skrecky

I have just completed work on Version 3.8 of the GCACE Atari ST Software Catalogue. Another three disks have been added as follows:

KISSDEMO.LZH 112K #191-Digitized animation of a gal who is kissing the life out of an Evil Microsoft Corporation Sales Rep.

LOVESPY.LZH 637K #191-Use the "Power" of your Atari Computer to destroy all those evil Commodore Amiga computers & you will be rewarded with a tune!

ST_VIRUS.LZH 17K #191-Large listing of viruses available on the Atari ST.

BIGDOS03.LZH 42K #192- Patch AHDI to handle up to 32 disk partitions.

BOOTSIE.LZH 28K #192-Bootsie Version 1.61. Write useful boot sectors: 50hz, med rez, etc.

DIVERT13.LZH 3K #192-Divert all Drive A: accesses to a hard drive partition.

FISHER.LZH 45K #192-Fisherman's database.

FLYSHARK.LZH 130K #192- 1 level demo of Flying Shark, a scrolling shoot-em-up game like Raiden. Note: Place files in the main directory of a disk.

HDX504.LZH 62K #192- Atari Advanced Hard Disk Utilities. Version 5.04.

HOMEWORK.LZH 142K #192- Homeworker. A word processor designed for children.

HSMODA06.LZH 162K #192- Serial Port Fixer. ST's to Falcons. German/English.

KDP65.LZH 23K #192- Kwik Disk Configuration Editor. Version 6.5. Increases access speed for reading & writing to floppy drives.

P_RADIO.LZH 132K #192- A collection of Packet Radio software.

PHONG.LZH 13K #193- Demo of a

See *Catalogue* on Page 4

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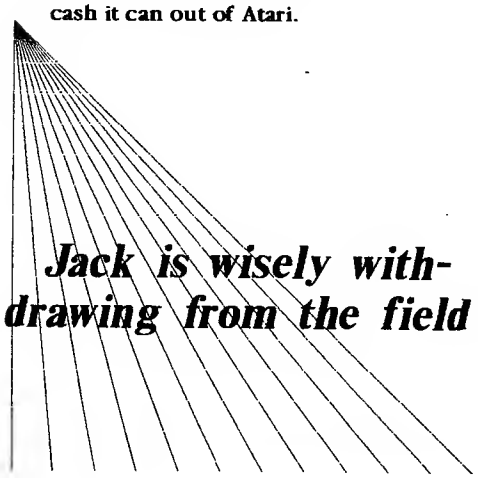
There were rumours at the Sacramento Atari Expo '96 concerning the possible disposal of Atari patents and copyrights. These suggested that rights to the Atari computer line and the Jaguar game system would be sold to third parties. Wizztronics was rumoured to be one of the potential purchasers of the rights to TOS and the ST/TT/Falcon line patents. Apparently some offers have been made for the Atari hardware patents, but I understand that so far Atari (or the Tramiels) is not treating these matters seriously. If and when the merger takes place we may see something definite. Atari has lots of cash assets, but this is offset by debts. I suspect that JTS will want to squeeze all the cash it can out of Atari.



That won't be very easy. Don Thomas of Atari has denied that the regular price of the Jaguar has been dropped below $99. He states that the $50 price was limited to a special sales promotion. However, both Sega and Sony have cut their game console prices in half (now around $150 US). To compete, a number of outlets are continuing to sell the Jaguar at $50, and are reducing the price of games too. Some dealers are selling the JagCD at reduced prices as well. One is selling the JagCD at half price ($75) with the sale of two CD games. Another has sold out at $50 per JagCD unit. In Britain new JagCD's and Jaguar console units are selling for 50 UKP. Apparently Electronic Boutique (EB) in Britain has the Jaguar back in stock. This is not because the Jaguar is selling well. It's because EB can't return them to Atari.

Point Communications has rated Atari's home page on the World Wide Web in the top five percent. And the June 14th update of Atari's home page listed Breakout 2000 due for release in 6 to 8 weeks. If it is released, the game may be Atari's last. There are rumours that several Jaguar games have been completed on contract for Atari, games that will never be released. Late last year, JV Enterprises submitted Towers II for the Jaguar. Atari intended to produce Towers II and listed it as a game in progress. Then Atari cancelled it. However, another publisher, Telegames, has signed an agreement with JV Enterprises, and the game Towers II is being readied for production. Indeed, the code has been sent to Atari for approval and encryption. This support for Towers II has brought about a clamour for Telegames to consider publishing some of the other games that Atari has discontinued. Telegames might do that, but only if Towers II sells well. Telegames also has a mail order division, Telegames Direct. They stock games for all Atari consoles including the Jaguar, Lynx, 7800, 5200, 2600, and many other systems.

Another group intending to release a Jaguar game is 4-play. The game Battle Sphere is in the final debugging stage. Tom Harker of ICD is backing this enterprise to some extent, and will be looking after distribution. They may have to distribute through mail order. Advertising would be through online services, print magazines and postcards. The cost of producing a game on a cartridge is relatively high, so the coding has to be flawless. If the game doesn't sell well they could lose a bundle. The developers say that Battle Sphere will be released, unless it seems that they would take a big loss. It has been said that if the Jaguar was a CD ROM based system, games could turn a reasonable profit with a small run of say 5000. Furthermore, it would be easy to create beta copies of games for testing. Of course one can get a CD ROM player for the Jaguar, but the established base of JagCD users is small.

Atari seems to be on the verge of extinction. This is true whether the merger with JTS goes through or not. Years ago, when he was running Commodore, Jack Tramiel said that business is war. As commander of Atari, he has entered into a series of drawn out, losing battles. His last campaign in the video game market has been the most disastrous of all. Facing annihilation, Jack is wisely withdrawing from the field.

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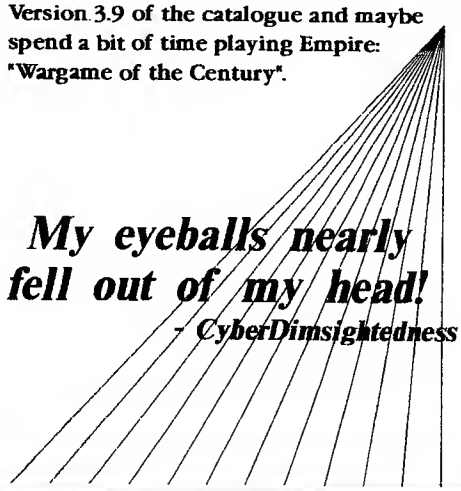
phong-shaded, rotating head.
ST_FTP.LZH 8K #193- June 1996 Atari ST FTP list.
TANDEM.LZH 3K #193- Tandem Version 1.0. Combines both floppies (A: & B:) into one single disk as far as file & folder handling goes. Very useful for some games such as Spirit of Excalibur which does not recognize Drive B:.
WWW130A.LZH 461K #193- STiK Version 1.30. Web Browser for the Atari ST. Works in all graphics modes. Note: You also need a file called WWW130B.LZH.
WWW130B.LZH 271K #193- STiK Version 1.30. Web Browser for the Atari ST. Works in all graphics modes. Note: You also need a file called WWW130A.LZH.

I just have a couple of things I would like to mention. First of all, the May 1996 issue of ST Informer is on sale at Tesseract Software. Tesseract recently moved to a new location. If you want to buy the latest issue of ST informer, you can visit Tesseract at 966 Yates Street.

In a recent issue of Current Notes, I saw an advertisement for Systems For Tomorrow. This is an Atari Dealership which is located in Independence, Missouri. My eyeballs nearly fell out of my head when I noticed they had Ishar III on sale for $19.99. I have been looking for this ST game for well over a year. So, I have already phoned them and the game is now on its way to Victoria. Systems For Tomorrow accepts credit cards and they also have a 1-800 number which is valid for the US & Canada. SFT has some good prices so anybody that may want to contact them should dial 1-800-875-4943. They also have an email address which is kkordes1@delphi.com.

Well, that is all I have to say for this report. It is time for me to start working on Version 3.9 of the catalogue and maybe spend a bit of time playing Empire: "Wargame of the Century".



Farewell, Alex

by Rowland Grant

Ol' Hackers Atari Users Group was founded more than a decade ago by Alex Pignato. Unlike many computer clubs devoted to Atari 8-bit computers, Ol' Hackers survived. It continued in its original form until it became what it is now, an anchor for all 8-bit Atari users in North America. The success of Ol' Hackers is due to the devotion of its members, especially those who served as its officers and leaders. Ol' Hackers produces a bimonthly newsletter on disk. It has a large library of 8-bit software, most of which has been carefully reviewed. But mainly Ol' Hackers projects a friendly, cooperative, supportive and generous atmosphere. This can only be a reflection of it's leaders, and in particular of Alex Pignato who has served Ol' Hackers as president from the beginning. Alex also was editor of its fine, and possibly unique newsletter. Alex Pignato passed away suddenly on Wednesday, June 26, 1996. Our little world of friends, bound by a common interest, is much diminished by the loss.

Steven Tucker has released the latest update of his Atari Peripheral Emulator (APE) now version 1.09. This is PC software that turns a loaded PC into a hardware peripheral for an Atari 8-bit system. It allows the 8-bit to access the disk drives, hard drive, CD ROM, printer and serial ports of the PC. Atari 8-bit software is commonly stored as a PC file representing a whole 8-bit disk. These files are called disk images. There are several common formats for these images such as ATR, XFD and DCM, and it can get a bit confusing. Steven Tucker has also released Imagic, a Windows 95/NT disk image generator. Imagic will create disk images in various formats and will change the formats of existing images. Another of Steven's clever hacks is APE ProSystem. This will make disk images of copy protected 8-bit disks and will emulate the conditions required for the protected software to run. Of course this adds another disk image format, the .PRO image. APE 1.09 will now support enhanced density disk images. However it will not handle the earlier .PRO images, which must be converted to the current version. A utility, PRO2TO3.EXE is provided to do this on the PC. The new APE 1.09 is a worthwhile upgrade. It fixes a number of bugs, especially in 850 interface emulation. There have been a number of visible changes in the file selector and of course many refinements of the code. Atari Peripheral Interface with ProSystem is shareware.

There is still no news from Fine Tooned Engineering. Its owner, Mike Hohman, recently married and has subsequently moved to parts unknown. With him goes much of the treasures of the Atari 8-bit world in the form of the rights to ICD, OSS and Newell hardware and software. Can't blame Mike for getting on with his life, but it would be nice to know how to reach him. Bob Puff is another Atari treasure keeper in the form of CSS hardware and software. I understand that Bob Puff is active in the PC world, however he is still supporting CSS in his spare time. I note that Bob has done another production run of Black Box interfaces. Demand has been steady and he ran out of stock. More gossip. American TechnaVision in California was a long time supporter of Atari 8-bit computers. I've bought a number of items from them in the past through mail order. Apparently they have decided to quit and their assets have been bought by Video 61 of Minneapolis. That leaves two major outlets in California, B & C ComputerVisions and Best Electronics. Even more gossip. The University of Michigan has been the master site for storage of PD software, particularly for Atari ST and 8-bit computers. UMich had everything, but was not easy to log onto directly, usually requiring a mirror site. And recently the Atari 8-bit base was pronounced dead, as it was impossible to upload files to it. We are assured that this is all changed now as super enthusiast William Kendrick has taken charge. He has reorganized the catalogue, and everything should be up and running by now.

I came across a list of new 8-bit games from Eastern Europe. They are distributed by Polen. The following are by Mirage. Around the Planet is a helicopter game. Rockman is a run and jump game with music. Starball is similar to OXYD on the ST. Crypts of Egypt is another cavern hazard maze game. Sikorsoft has produced the following. Cyborg is a puzzle game. Fire Stone is a Boulder Dash clone. Sexy Six is a puzzle game which involves the exasperating complexities of simultaneously disrobing six young women chosen from a roster of 34. The game uses digitized images in 256 colours.

In the good old days, quite a number of computers used the 6502 CPU that is also the heart of the original Atari, Apple and Commodore computers. One of these was the CS/A computer. This version used an operating system called OS/A65. Inspired by Unix, it was multitasking, multithreading and quite sophisticated for its time. The CS/A computer had a special memory management unit which is lacking on Apple, Commodore and Atari computers. This made a port over to those platforms difficult. But recently Andre Fachat, the author of OS/A65, took another look at his code, and managed to create a version that would run a Commodore 64. This version OS/A65 1.3.6g is copyrighted under the GNU public license. Andre feels that it would be fairly straight forward to convert the C64 version to the Atari 800 and Apple II computers. However he leaves this as a challenge to others.

William Moeller and Michael Schoedel have founded Triple SSS Shareware. This is a part time business devoted to public domain and shareware software for all Atari 8-bit computers. They will operate somewhat like Bellcom used to, but the catalogues will be on disk and on line, rather than being printed. A vast amount of PD software is available. This will be reviewed, and only those items considered to be of commercial quality will be offered. They have published their first catalogue, which lists about 123 titles. It should be available now on the Pothole BBS. The disks seem to be single sided and may be extended density. Prices are $2.50 per disk plus $4.00 for postage and handling per order of (almost) any size. Outside Canada, payment is in U.S. dollars, inside Canada pay with Canadian dollars. Orders go to Triple SSS, 720 Rennie Street, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8H 3R2. For the time being make money orders out to William Moeller.

OMEn becomes *Oases* and Goes Multi-Media

Many exciting developments have been taking place at EDLI, and it's about time we told you what they are! We've made the operating system more available, and of course, we are continually improving it.

The App-Launch program and directory "bookmarks", plus the ability to play a sound or view a picture simply by clicking on the file, help users navigate and find things easily, and behind the scenes, new calls such as picture (RLE) encode-decode provide good support for new items such as movies and shrinking large picture files.

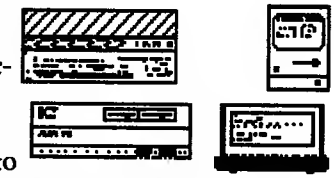
And, at last, we have some software of value to end users as well as to programmers... a means to create your own multi-media literature materials. If our plan for helping people to distribute their creations works out, you may even be able to make money writing such materials.

Everything is on-line (or about to go on line) at our web site (URL below): the Oases system itself; programming manuals and Eazy-Asm assembler; the premiere edition of Interactive Author, the multimedia literature creation software; and more.

* System name

The OMEn (Open Multitasking ENvironment) operating system has been renamed Oases Open Software Environment (how about "Open Architecture Software Environment System", if you're hooked on acronyms). This is expected to make the system more appealing to many English speaking users, as "OMEn" always seemed to have a little black cloud over it in spite of many attempts to ward it off!

* Macintosh/Power Mac version



The Macintosh version of Oases is on sale. It runs on all tested models from Mac-512KE through Power PC 6100/60. The Macintosh version runs exactly the same software as the Atari version, except for a couple of very machine-specific prog rams like the Atari-ST VIDI-Recorder. The display, too, looks virtually identical to other versions. Oases for Mac will make use of any mounted Macintosh volume, including file servers and CDs. Currently Supported displays are monochrome, 256 colour and 32768 colour ("Thousands" setting).

The PC porting is currently on hold owing to the range of other committments, but will certainly be completed at the earliest possible date. We expect the current range of products to generate interest in a joint venture for completeing the PC and other portings.

* Movies

We've come out with a simple spec to define Oases movies containing animated graphics, still-picture "slides", and sound. Movies are played in the Interactive Textbook program, and other software can easily be written to play movies. The movie spec allows creation of movies and slideshows from any source of pictures and sounds.

And, we've taken a VIDI-ST video digitizer for Ataris and made the Atari-ST VIDI- Recorder program to create Oases movie animation sequences with 8 different video frame rates and sizes in four or sixteen levels of gray, with aspect ratios for most "normal" displays plus two for "ST-Medium-Rez" mode, with its tall pixels. A 2.5 or four megabyte ST or STE is demanded. The lowest frame rates and small sized pictures give over a minute of recording time on a 4 megabtye machine.

The Picture-Condenser utility program helps to trim down movies with larger pictures so they can better fit on a floppy disk. (Oases 3.38 and above automatically un-condense pictures for display.)

* Interactive Author and Interactive Textbook

These are our "star" programs. The premiere version of Interactive Author is now available on our web site (URL below). It allows its user to create and use multimedia "interactive textbook" literature on any conceivable topic, for reference works or educational curriculum.

See *OASES* on Page 7

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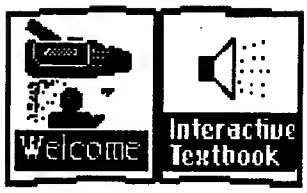
The "pages" of the "textbooks" may contain text, pictures, sounds, slide-shows and movie clips. Page-link buttons dynamically link pages, similar to hypertext.



And, as if that wasn't enough, "evaluation" items add the ability to use Interactive Textbooks for self-paced studies and distance education: all the teacher has to do is sit the student down at the computer. The student cannot proceed through the book without correctly answering the evaluation questions, and so when he/she returns having completed the "textbook", the teacher will know the material in it has been mastered.

We hope to compile a catalog of interactive textbook multimedia literature developed by other authors, and to offer distribution with commissions/royalties for *well-written, original-material-only* works.

Free Interactive Textbooks are also available for download on the web site... including "Using Interactive Author", whitch contains instructions for creating your own Multi-media literature.

* Download Oases

The Oases system is "protected" by having a colour coded software licence. It may, however, be run without the licence, and is available at our world wide web site: http://www.oases.com/~omen

Without the licence, it is possible to save only small files, and not large ones, to disk. But, it is entirely possible to use it, and to run Interactive Textbooks created by other users. (Distribution copies save files until the end of the month they were released.)

* Prices

Oases system licences, printed software development manuals and software developer registration are the only items for which EDLI currently charges: The premiere edition of Interactive Author and all our other items are free, or available on disk for shipping & handling charges.

Oases-for-Macintosh costs $69.95 Canadian. Oases-for-Atari is $44.95; or both licences for $99.95. (approx. US$ equivalents: $52.95, $33.95, and $74.95) Order by August 15th and get 25% off any above item. Order Interactive-Author Professional Edition for the special pre-release price of $69.95 Cdn/$52.95 US, with delivery late fall or early winter '96.

* Availability

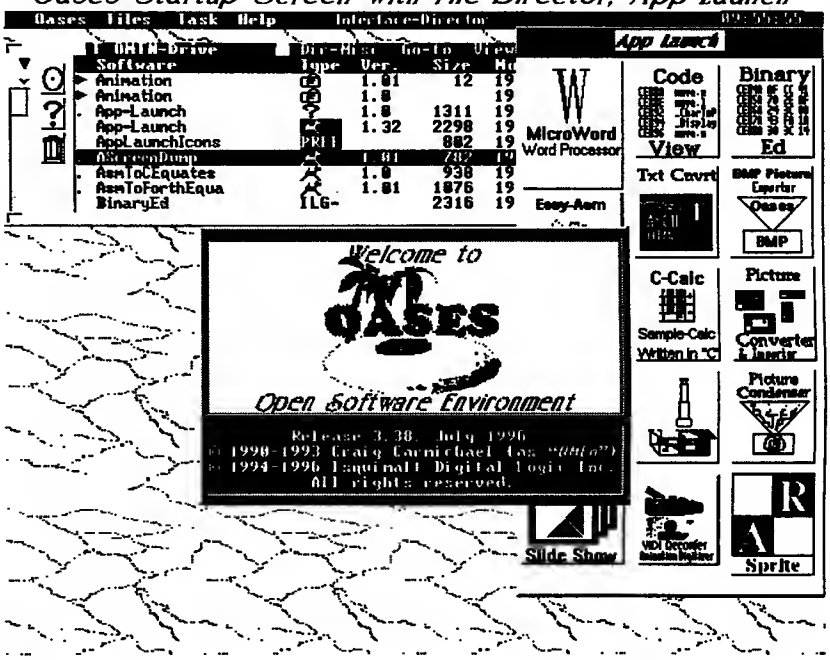
Oases products are available from:

EDLI
820 Dunsmuir Road
Victoria, BC
Canada V9A 5B7

tel: (604) 384 0499
fax: (604) 384 0575
email: omen@islandnet.com
web: http://www.oases.com/~omen

We are interested in dealers... If you know of a possibly interested dealer, please get in touch.

Oases Startup Screen with File-Director, App-Launch



New 'TT' Clones

by Rowland Grant

While Atari seems to be shutting down and awaiting the day that it becomes a disk drive manufacturer, others maybe somewhat more optimistic about the future of the Atari computer market. Thomas Ferreira proposed starting a new magazine for Atari computers and asked for comments on the internet. There was good initial response but interest dropped as time went on. So Thomas decided to start a magazine for Apple Newton users who seem to be more enthusiastic. Of course we still have a few magazines for ST computers. There are *Current Notes* and *ST Informer* in North America. In the UK there are still *ST Format* and *ST Applications*. In Germany there are *ST Computer* and *Atari Inside*. In France there is *ST Magazine*. Atari may be absconding, but there still seems to be good reasons for the magazines to keep going. After all, there's some new hardware and software to be advertised and reviewed.

The latest *Current Notes* had a number of such ads. For some time Computer Direct in Edmonton has been assembling customized TT computers using the original TT motherboard in a custom case. Now with a custom motherboard, the TT clone is using the more powerful Motorola 68040 and 68060 CPU chips. Only the TOS 3.06 chip is from Atari, and that has been modified. These computers are housed in a tower case. They are open architecture so that almost any PC peripheral can be used. This includes EIDE and SCSI type devices (CD ROM drives and hard drives), graphics cards for SVGA monitors and SIMM memory cards. The basic model comes with all the standard TT external ports such as SCSI, Modem 1 and Modem 2, LAN and MIDI ports. It does not have the cartridge port or the DMA port. However a ST compatible I/O card will be available soon.

These custom TT clones are highly compatible and will run almost all ST/TT productivity software. While the flexibility of this arrangement is desirable, it is the speed that is most important. The DirecT40 (68040 32/64 MHz) will run about four times as fast as a standard TT. The DirecT60 (68060 60 MHz) will run 17 times as fast. This would be one of the fastest TOS machines currently available. The price of a basic DirecT40 is $3400 CDN. For the DirecT60, add another $400. Graphics work such as ray tracing and rendering can take hours on a regular TT (or any regular computer for that matter). The DirecT60 is expensive compared to a regular TT, but it is cheap compared to a work station if faster image rendering must be done.

The DirecT40/60 computers are almost identical in specifications to the new Hades computers manufactured by Medusa Computer Systems of Switzerland. Moreover, the basic models use the same ET4000 graphics card and employ the NVDI 4 accelerator. The only difference is that DirecT40/60 has an 850 MB EIDE hard drive, while the Hades has a 1.3 GB EIDE hard drive. Hades computers are available from Toad Computers, and the 68040 system costs $2499 (US). The prices of DirecT40 and Hades computers are almost identical. Toad adds $649 (US) for a 68060 upgrade. This makes the 68060 Hades more expensive than the DirecT60. The prices of the DirecT40/60 computers were originally quite a bit higher. However when Toad advertised Hades, the DirecT40/60 prices dropped.

Toad also sells the Medusa computer. This is quite different from the Hades and DirecT designs. It has a three tiered bus for transmitting data with maximum efficiency and compatibility. There is a six-slot main 32-bit data bus running at 32MHz, a 4-slot ST bus for 16-bit data at 8MHz and a 2 slot RAM bus for 128MB. The ST bus handles all the standard ST interfaces, an ISA bus for a graphics card and an IDE interface. This bus design allows the Medusa to run some software much faster than the Hades computer using the same microprocessor. The price of a basic Medusa system with a 68040 is $3499 (US).

Of course an alternative to the advanced GEM machines is emulation or insertion in other platforms. The Gemulator on PC computers is software but needs TOS ROMs on a card to run. However, laptop computers don't have space or sockets inside for TOS ROMs. Darek Mihocka of Branch Always Software has avoided this limitation by doing away with ROM chips and using the MagiC TOS replacement software. Without the ROM card the cost for the laptop version is only $119.95 (US). Branch Always must have some kind of arrangement with Applications Systems Heidelberg (ASH), the owners of MagiC. I expect that this laptop version would run just as well on any PC. An emulator running under Windows95 using MagiC has been demonstrated by ASH. Maybe ASH and Branch Always have swapped some code.

There are also cards that contain most of the essential circuitry of a ST. These cards are meant to be plugged into a socket on a PC. The Janus was one of these cards. It was limited to the peripherals available on the host PC. Now I understand that C-Lab has added MIDI and cartridge ports to the Janus design so that it can be used with current C-Lab software. I notice that a similar plug-in PC card called STzer has been produced by Terratec. It also has MIDI and cartridge ports and is projected to cost about 300 UKP.

There is a rumour that someone somewhere makes interfaces which allow IDE type peripherals to run on a ST. The interface plugs into the cartridge port. It will handle two devices such as a hard drive and a CD ROM. The price is $85. I understand that some of these interfaces have been in use for a year and have performed well.

ASH has recently advertised new versions of its products. There is MagiC 5, EASE 5, MagiCMac 2.0 and a suite of applications programs. The big change is file name lengths. From the beginning, Apple Macintosh computers have been able to use long, descriptive file names. Now Windows 95 has copied the Mac and provides for long file names too. Up to now, DOS and ST software file names were restricted to eight characters plus an extender of three. Of course, the ST can handle DOS text files and image formats, but it might not be able to import files that were prepared under Windows 95. To get around this, Magic 5 now uses the Windows 95 VFAT file system which allows long file names on the ST as well. There is a utility that enables the user to activate or deactivate long file names. When deactivated, the long filenames are truncated to eleven characters. Apparently hard drive partitions can be switched to VFAT without reformatting. Another benefit of the VFAT file system is that partitions may be greater than 32 MB without using enormous sectors. Software such as HD Driver is needed to handle this.

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MagiC 5.0 has other improvements such as an increase in the maximum number of processes (126) that can operate at the same time under multi-tasking. Now MagiC can use linkages such as threads and signals to speed up certain processes. The other software, EASE 5 desktop replacement, and the latest versions of Texel, ArtWorx, Phoenix in the ASH-Office series will also support the long filenames of MagiC 5. I notice that Texel, a spreadsheet program is advertised by Computer Direct in Edmonton. I am concerned about long file names. The ST depends occasionally on certain extenders. For instance the .ACC extender is required for a file to be loaded at boot-up as an accessory. I should add that mounting accessories was a lot simpler under GEM than under the Mac operating system, at least until recently. I guess the clever people at ASH have worked around the accessory extender problem.

MagicMac 2.0 is a considerable advance. It has all the improvements of Magic 5.0, and is now much better integrated with the Macintosh operating system. In addition to the Mac screen resolutions, MagicMac 2.0 now supports ST low and medium. Programs that must use these resolutions are more likely to run now. ST high resolution has been optimized, and all three ST resolutions now use PowerMac native routines. There is an accessory running in the background that communicates between MagicMac and the Mac operating system. So a double click on an Atari program on the Mac desktop (called Finder) will cause the program to run under MagicMac. CD ROM drives now appear under MagicMac 2.0 as just another drive. Previously, each CD itself had to be installed as if it were a separate drive.

The only reason to be interested in these new fast TOS computers or clever hacks like MagiC is to run TOS software. A lot of TOS software remains. The Toad Computers catalogue gives a fairly good overview of what's available. Upgrades for much of this software are still being issued. For instance, Version 4 of the Papyrus document processor continues to be developed by ROM Logicware even though they have ported it over to OS/2 and the Macintosh. Which means that they consider Papyrus as good as the competition on those platforms. And there continues to be new software turning up. For instance, Homa Systems is advertising Photoline, a new high end image editor. It handles all formats of image files as well as photo CD imports. This is a professional tool, expensive at $279 CDN from Computer Direct, but less costly than similar software on other platforms. This is true of Calamus, Digital Arts Layout, Picture, and many other image handling and publishing software for TOS based computers.

On the other hand, new commercial games are scarce. But there are public domain and shareware sources. In this area there is lots of development going on. The example of ID software getting rich from a shareware game called DOOM has stimulated a lot of clones, even on Atari platforms. There was the group effort DOOM clone called Bad Mood which I haven't heard much of lately. Now there is another DOOM clone for the Falcon called Running. A demo has been released showing much better game play than Bad Mood, but somewhat simpler graphics. Now another DOOM clone called KillThings ('cause that's all you do) is being developed in the UK by Andrew Robertson. Andrew is attempting to create better graphics and without sacrificing good game play. He is also working other shoot-em-up games involving tanks and such. The heavy demand on graphics rendering makes it difficult to do elaborate real-time games on anything but a Falcon. It's worse on a PC where the latest DOOM type games require high speed Pentium computers and a huge memory capacity. Let's face it, TOS computers are not really game machines any more. They're for serious music, text and image production. But Pentium PC's, they're the game machines.

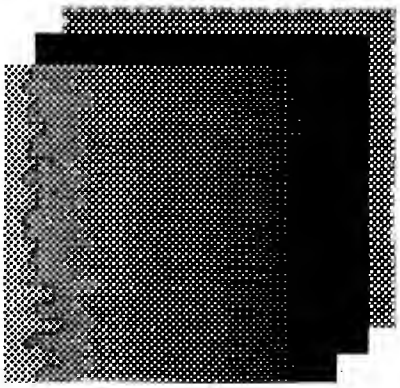
Ol' Hackers Atari Users Group

by Rowland Grant

The Ol' Hackers Atari User Group is mainly that, hackers. In May I received a letter and a disk from Ron Fetzer which illustrates their activities. I will take the liberty to quote part of the letter here.

"I am mailing you a game called "SUB ATTACK". It is an older game, but I reworked it so that it now saves your name and high score in the game and on the disk. It is a very playable game. We use it when we hold a contest in the club. Alex modified the high score routine in the game. I think you will like it. On the back of the disk we have a very nice "COOKING RECIPE PROGRAM" which Alex and I modified to work better."

That's it. They enjoy fixing up and improving public domain software. Then they share the results with their friends and kindred spirits. Alex Pignato was a successful trial attorney in the New York area. I can imagine him returning home from a day of courtroom frustrations to a computer that can provide real intellectual satisfaction. Modest programming efforts can cause the Atari 800 series of computers to respond with remarkable power and effect (as we demonstrated at the June meeting). It was and remains a hacker's computer. Sadly, we bid farewell to Alex Pignato, the original Ol' Hacker who died on June 26.



8-Bit Demos!

by Rowland Grant

The May general meeting was our annual Swap and Shop. Steve Lemmen usually brings his large collection of spare ST software. However Steve was moving, and was putting most of his belongings in storage. Fortunately we got to Steve before he had packed his computer things. There is a lot of old but good software around. Some of it is still on the market. I picked up LDW Power spreadsheet for a few dollars, and found that Toad Computers still lists it at $109 (US). Some bargain!

The general meeting in June had no scheduled feature, so we decided to show some 8-bit demos for a change. We used a 130XE and a colour monitor to show the demos at their best. I started off by running the title screens and demos from our collection of ABBUC disks. I then showed some 8-bit software that we had done in the past. There was Ted Skrecky's fancy title screen and his font data writer written using the Action! compiler. I showed my long multiplication practice program (grade 3 level) using mixed graphics, written in BASIC. Then Ted showed his favourite demos. Among them was the music "My body your body", the dancing Veronica and others. Time ran out too quickly to show everything.

We have been running a bit over budget on our newsletter and postage. This is because we publish all submissions, and that often takes more than ten pages. Ten pages (5 paper sheets) is the maximum that we can send without paying higher postal rates. Rather than restricting our newsletter content, we could resort to a number of economies. We could post the newsletter on the Pothole BBS and Victoria Freenet for those who have access, and thereby save a few mailings and printings. We could also reduce the complimentary copies that we send out. We could also try to raise more money. One idea is to sell a disk of the month at meetings. All these matters will be discussed at the next general meeting in July.

While exploring the net, Ted Skrecky came across notice of "The Atari Times". After an exchange of messages, we received a copy. The Atari Times has seven pages in newsletter format. It is published by Greg George in Florida. The Atari Times is mostly devoted to Atari games, but there was one article concerning the ST. Bob Lussier, one of our supporters in Vancouver, has acquired a PC. He doesn't have an Atari computer any more. However, he still has subscriptions to Atari magazines. These he has been mailing to us. Thanks to Bob Lussier for thinking of us.

I have just received a copy of the Ol' Hackers newsletter. With it is a notice of Alex Pignato's death. However, Ol' Hackers will be continuing. Alan Sharkis is the new editor of the Ol' Hackers newsletter, Ron Fetzer remains secretary and treasurer. All the best to them.

CAM/Regina Leader Po